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In November 2011, with the Army's 82nd Airborne Division in the thick of the fight in Afghanistan, an urgent request was transmitted from the war zone to Army officials in the Pentagon for a more effective, off-the-shelf software program to counter deadly improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

After several failed attempts at breaking through the Army's bureaucratic hierarchy, an officer from the 82nd Airborne pleaded that the delivery of a new system, used by the Marine Corps and other commands, was a matter of "lives and limbs." Still, Army officials resisted.

The Army's justification was that its in-house system, the Distributed Common Ground System, or DCGS, exceeds the quality and effectiveness of the alternate Palantir software that the 82nd Airborne wanted.

Ultimately, after several grueling months, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno intervened and approved the use of Palantir for an element of the 82nd Airborne. Underscoring Palantir's effectiveness, before Odierno's approval, the 82nd Airborne pointed to a 12 percent increase in IED find-and-clear rates when the alternate technology was borrowed from another unit transitioning out of Afghanistan.

In its most basic form, Palantir and DCGS are intelligence-gathering software programs designed to store and compute data for myriad things, including predicting IED locations. Both systems have value and serve a purpose, but Palantir is what Army combat units are requesting because it outperforms DCGS where they share a common function. There is no reason whatsoever that they should be denied the same technological advantage available to the Marine Corps, the Air Force, Special Operations Command, the Pentagon's joint IED-defeat organization and our Allies — all of which use Palantir.

The Army is still resistant to Palantir, making it nearly impossible to acquire. Soon after approving Palantir for the 82nd Airborne, Odierno ordered the Army Test and Evaluation

Command to conduct a review of the technology. The review was based entirely on survey data from war fighters in Afghanistan and, in April 2012, ATEC reported that 96 percent of survey participants recommended Palantir. The report also suggested offering a one-week training course and sending more servers to support the software.

Presumably aggravated, Army officials rescinded the first ATEC report, ordered it destroyed, and replaced it with a second version. The altered report removed favorable commentary about Palantir, including the recommendation to send more servers to Afghanistan, and deleted, for instance, comments describing the DCGS systems as “overcomplicated, requires lengthy classroom instruction, and is an easily perishable skill set if not used constantly.”

This is now the subject of congressional review, as well as an internal Army investigation ordered by Odierno. Differences between the first and second reports will be examined thoroughly, in addition to the perpetual resistance from midlevel bureaucrats in providing ground forces with the best intelligence tools available, for reasons that are suspect at best.

There's another aspect to all this that's indicative of an even bigger problem: The acquisition process appears fatally flawed, to the point where it's disadvantaging the military men and women it's intended to support. In this case, units in Afghanistan, collaborating with other services, have requested a system that they need to do their mission and prevent casualties. The fact that they are told “tough luck” and forced to operate with underperforming resources because of internal Army preferences that don't meet demands is a real disservice to those who are undertaking the Afghan mission and confronting an enemy that primarily relies on IEDs to kill American soldiers and Marines.

My interest in this issue is not just related to my oversight role as a member of the House Armed Services Committee. When I was in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Marine Corps, I witnessed the IED threat and its impact on operations. IEDs are still the leading cause of U.S. casualties. These bombs have killed thousands and caused physical and emotional pain to many more. So when the 82nd Airborne experienced a 12 percent increase in find-and-clear rates from software other than what the Army prefer they use, it's necessary to put that 12 percent in the context of American lives.

It was late last year when this matter was first brought to my attention by soldiers directly involved in the fight. In February, I spoke directly with Odierno and soon after he did the right thing and approved Palantir for an 82nd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. But what I've since

come to learn is that other units within the 82nd Airborne have been denied Palantir and the Army has stubbornly resisted requests from the 101st Airborne Division and the 3rd Infantry Division. Each of these units has a visible presence during their time in theater and it is unsettling to think that they are being denied resources for all the wrong reasons.

As Congress and Odierno conduct their investigations, there are certain truths that will be revealed. What matters most, above all, is that ground combat units, specifically those directly engaging the enemy, are provided the most effective tools available, as quickly as possible. That must be the collective priority of Congress, the administration and the Pentagon, and there should be no tolerance for anything less.